

Attacking Partnerships

Although you may use more than two central attackers and therefore have more than one *number ten* or more than one *number nine* in your attack, the mechanics of the different attacking combinations can be thought of in terms of attacking partnerships.

Since there are various different types of *number tens* and *number nines*, as shown above, there are also various different possible combinations for attacking partnerships. However, these combinations can be categorised into just three main types of attacking partnership in which each player complements the other effectively. These are the **big man - little man**, **creator - scorer** and **false nine - false ten** partnerships.

Each partnership is explained below, with suitable roles and tactical styles suggested for each. The abilities required by players in each partnership are also discussed, in order to help you choose the best roles for your attackers by referring to the abilities given for each role above.

Big Man - Little Man

The *big man - little man* partnership utilises the individual **physical abilities** of the two attackers. It can therefore be especially useful in lower reputation league divisions where players have poorer technical ability and intelligence. It can also work well in higher reputation divisions, particularly for lower ability teams.

However, good passing ability, creativity or dribbling ability for either player can give them an additional advantage. This would allow you to incorporate elements of the *creator-scorer* partnership, discussed below, to provide an alternative attacking threat.

Number Ten

Your *number ten* will need to have good **physical presence** and **aerial presence**, and preferably good **control**, so he can provide an effective target for aerial balls. **Endeavour** would also be beneficial.

When receiving direct passes he will try to either bring the ball under his control or provide a knock-down, flick-on or lay-off for his partner or another teammate. When he has control of the ball he will use his strength to hold it up while waiting for teammates to get forward to support the attack, before making a simple pass, perhaps to his partner or to a more technically able or creative player. If he is close enough to goal he may also try to set up a chance for himself or attempt a header directly at goal. He will provide a similar threat from crosses.

He may also contribute with creative passes, particularly if he has decent **passing ability** and **creativity**.

His deeper positioning means that any opposition defender who chooses to mark him when he is off the ball or close him down when he is on the ball will leave space behind that his partner can exploit. In particular, he may be able to use his physical ability to take his marker out of the game by winning aerial challenges and other physical tussles.

If he is instead left in space by the opposition defence then he will have more freedom to choose an appropriate pass or shoot at goal.

He will be most effective in the striker position if he relies mainly on his physical ability as opposed to his technical ability and creativity. This will make it easier for him to set up chances with simple passes and to get into goal-scoring positions himself, while his physical ability means he will still be able to provide an effective link with your deeper players.

- **Typical Role:** Target Man (ST Support).
- **Suggested Alternative Roles:** Defensive Forward (ST Defend/Support), Deep-Lying Forward (ST Support) or Attacking Midfielder (AMC Support).

Number Nine

Your *number nine* will need either good **mobility** or good **attacking movement** to effectively feed off the supply of his partner and other teammates and to exploit the space created by his partner.

He may also attempt to create chances for himself, and perhaps his partner and other teammates, by running at the opposition defence when he has the ball, particularly if he has decent **dribbling ability**. In addition, he may attempt some creative passes, especially if he has decent **passing ability** and **creativity**.

Like his partner, he will be most effective in the striker position, especially if he relies mainly on his physical ability as opposed to his technical ability and creativity. This will allow him to play off the shoulder of the opposition defenders where he can more easily exploit any space, run onto passes from his partner or other teammates or work his way into a dangerous position when with an opposition defender. In the striker position he will also make his partner more effective by providing him with a closer passing option.

- **Typical Role:** Poacher (ST Attack).
- **Suggested Alternative Roles:** Advanced Forward (ST Attack), Attacking Midfielder (AMC Attack) or Raumdeuter (AM(L/R) Attack).

The Reverse Setup

It is also possible to play a strong attacker further forward as your *number nine*. This will make him more of a goal-scoring threat but he will also be less well positioned to provide a link with the rest of your team and will be less likely to set up chances for his teammates. However, he will still provide a link by acting as a target for direct passes and crosses.

Most notably, this setup can open up space in front of the opposition defence for a *number ten* in central attacking midfield or the striker position. He should ideally be capable of creating chances for himself by running with the ball at the opposition defence to some extent, so that your attack is not relying too heavily on your *number nine's* physical strength to score goals. In his deeper position he will provide a more effective link in general play, while he may also have some responsibility for creating chances for others. However, it is advisable that he does not attempt creative passes too often unless his partner or other more advanced teammates have good enough attacking movement or mobility to get on the end of such passes.

A second, more typical number nine may also be used to exploit the space created.

- **Suggested Roles:** For the *number nine*; Target Man (ST Attack), Deep-Lying Forward (ST Attack) or Attacking Midfielder (AMC Attack). For the *number ten*; Defensive Forward (ST Support) or Attacking Midfielder (AMC Support).

Use in Tactical Styles

The *big man - little man* partnership is the natural choice for styles that **play the ball direct to a strong central attacker**, such as the *Playing To A Target Man* style.

It is also a good option for styles that focus on **crossing the ball into the opposition penalty area**, such as the *Attacking The Flanks* style, since your *number ten* will provide an effective target.

In addition, it is a good option for styles that **use quick attackers to break into space in and behind the opposition defence**, such as the *Counter Attacking* style. When your team is counter attacking your *number ten* will help to get the ball to these players quickly by receiving direct passes and holding up the ball if necessary, while when your team is not counter attacking he will contribute to slower build-up play.

With the *Playing To A Target Man* and *Attacking The Flanks* styles in particular, it is advisable to use your *number ten* in the striker position. Your *number nine* will also tend to provide more of a threat in this position, but with the *Attacking The Flanks* style he could still be effective in central attacking midfield since many aerial balls will come from crosses higher up the pitch, giving him more of a chance to get into the penalty area.

With the *Counter Attacking* style either of your *number ten* or *number nine* is more likely to be of use in central attacking midfield than in other styles, but you should ensure that their abilities are appropriate for this position, as discussed above.

Using your number nine in one of the wide forward positions is an alternative option in any of these styles, but this is less appropriate for the *Attacking The Flanks* style where it will reduce the attacking threat down his flank.

The physical aspects of this partnership can also be combined effectively with the *creator-scorer* or *false-nine - false-ten* partnerships in any tactical style, due to the additional threats provided by an attack with good all-round ability.

For example, a central attacker with good aerial presence can provide a main or alternative threat from crosses in all styles.

As a more specific example; in styles that **play high up the pitch and use skilful attackers to run at the opposition**, such as the *Running At The Defence* and *Attacking The Flanks* styles, a *number ten* with good physical presence and aerial presence can link play by receiving direct passes. This can allow your team to get the ball forward more quickly to your skilful attackers. Furthermore, he can also contribute to creating chances for himself and his teammates if he has good technical and creative ability as well, as would typically be the case in the other two partnerships.

Creator – Scorer

The *creator – scorer* partnership utilises the **creativity and technical abilities** of the two attackers. It can therefore be especially useful in higher reputation league divisions and can also work well for higher ability teams in lower divisions.

However, good physical ability for either player can give them an additional advantage. This would allow you to incorporate elements of the *big man - little man* partnership to provide an alternative attacking threat.

Number Ten

Your *number ten* will need good *passing ability* and *creativity* to supply his partner and other teammates with creative passes through the opposition defence. He will also need some **dribbling ability** and **attacking movement** to be able to get into sufficient space to make these passes.

His deeper positioning means that any opposition defender who chooses to mark him when he is off the ball or close him down when he is on the ball will leave space behind that his partner can exploit. In particular, he will be able to use his attacking movement to drag his marker away from his defensive position, and his dribbling ability to get past opposition defenders who move out of position to close him down and to encourage further defenders to move out of position.

If he is instead left in space by the opposition defence then he will have more freedom to choose a creative pass, run at the opposition or shoot at goal.

He can be used in any of the striker, central attacking midfield or wide forward positions. In particular, in central attacking midfield he can provide a more effective link with your deeper players and help your team to control possession, while still being high enough to create chances. On the other hand, this can potentially lead to him being marked out of the game by the opposition's defensive midfielder unless he has particularly good attacking movement. He may instead be able to find more space in one of the wide forward positions or perhaps by dropping deep from the striker position.

- **Typical Roles:** Deep-Lying Forward (ST Support) or Advanced Playmaker (AMC/AM(L/R) Support/Attack).
- **Suggested Alternative Roles:** Complete Forward (ST Support), Trequartista (ST/AMC Attack), False Nine (ST Support), Attacking Midfielder (AMC Support), Enganche (AMC Attack) or Inside Forward (AM(L/R) Support).

Number Nine

Your *number nine* will need either good *attacking movement* or good *mobility* to effectively feed off the supply of his partner and other teammates and to exploit the space created by his partner. He will also need some **dribbling ability** so that he can create chances for himself.

In this partnership he is used in the striker position, where he will play off the shoulder of the opposition defenders. Alternatively, you could use him in central attacking midfield as part of a *false nine - false ten* partnership.

- **Typical Role:** Advanced Forward (ST Attack).

- **Suggested Alternative Roles:** Deep-Lying Forward (ST Attack), Complete Forward (ST Attack) or Poacher (ST Attack).

Sharing Responsibilities

This partnership can benefit from a *number nine* who has good *passing ability* and *creativity* so he can contribute to build-up play and chance creation, along with a *number ten* who has good *attacking movement* so he can get into dangerous positions and good *dribbling ability* so he can create chances for himself. This will allow your attackers to more evenly share their responsibilities and play more dynamically.

Use in Tactical Styles

This partnership is a good option for styles that attempt to **control play in the higher areas of the pitch**, such as the *Passing Through The Defence* and *Running At The Defence* styles which attack mainly through central players, and the *Attacking With Creative Wingers* style which attacks mainly through wide players. Your *number ten* will play a key part in creative build-up play.

It can also be a useful option for styles that **play more cautiously and attack on the break**, such as the *Counter Attacking* style. When your team is counter attacking your *number ten* will contribute to your team's attempts to get the ball to your quick *number nine* and other quick attackers in a more controlled manner with quick passes along the ground, while when your team is not counter attacking he will play an important part in slower build-up play.

With the *Passing Through The Defence* style the *number ten* is typically used in central attacking midfield. However, he may be used in the striker position, in which case he would benefit from creative support coming from a deeper teammate in the central midfield or central attacking midfield positions.

With the *Attacking With Creative Wingers* style you can either use your wide attackers as *number tens* if they are in the wide forward positions, or your *number ten* can be used in the striker position if your wide attackers are in the wide midfield positions. You may want to only use one wide *number ten* in order to help you balance your attack with an extra attacking player on the opposite flank. This can also make your team's attacking play more varied.

The *Running At The Defence* style can be set up similarly to either of the above two styles but using roles that instruct more runs with the ball would be appropriate.

Again, the *Counter Attacking* style can be set up similarly, but it is particularly advisable to use one wide attacker with a more attacking role to exploit space available on the flank after possession is won. Also, when used in central attacking midfield your *number ten* can contribute more easily to both defensive and attacking play.

False Nine – False Ten

The *false nine – false ten* partnership is similar to the *creator – scorer* partnership. However, your *number nine* will move forward from a deeper position in central attacking midfield, or possibly from one of the wide forward positions, while your number ten will drop deep from the striker position.

As such, *attacking movement* is more important for both players for this partnership to be performed effectively, especially for your *number ten*. In addition, *mobility* is more important for your *number nine*.

Number Ten

Again, by dropping deep your *number ten* will either create space for his partner or for himself. Typically though, he will drop even deeper so his partner can more easily overlap into the space created.

- **Typical Role:** False Nine (ST Support).
- **Suggested Alternative Roles:** Complete Forward (ST Support) or Trequartista (ST Attack).

Number Nine

Your number nine will make runs from deeper areas into the space ahead of his partner. He will therefore be far more difficult for the opposition defenders to mark and so more likely to be able to exploit the space. Furthermore, if he is followed by his marker then this can in turn create space in front of the opposition defence for his partner or another teammate to exploit.

- **Typical Role:** Shadow Striker (AMC Attack).
- **Suggested Alternative Roles:** Attacking Midfielder (AMC Attack), Inside Forward (AM(L/R) Attack) or Raumdeuter (AM(L/R) Attack).

Use in Tactical Styles

If performed well this partnership can be far more effective at creating space for your attackers than the *creator - scorer* partnership. Therefore, with capable players it can be a very good alternative option for styles that attempt to **control play in the higher areas of the pitch**, such as the *Passing Through The Defence* and *Running At The Defence* styles, which attack mainly through central players, and the *Attacking With Creative Wingers* style, which attacks mainly through wide players.

It can also be a useful option for styles that **play more cautiously and attack on the break**, such as the *Counter Attacking* style, but again your players will need to be of sufficient quality to carry out the partnership well.

Any balanced combination of *number tens* and *number nines* suitable for this partnership can be compatible across these styles.

Notably, this partnership is a natural choice if you want to use two *number tens* in the wide forward positions when using the *Attacking With Creative Wingers* style. The central *number nine* and *number ten* will provide passing options ahead of them when they bring the ball inside, and will themselves form a well balanced partnership. To achieve a similar setup with the *creator - scorer* partnership the two central attackers would have to both be given *number nine* roles which would cause them to be less effective at linking up with each other.

Again, roles that instruct more runs with the ball would be appropriate for the *Running At The Defence* style.

Lone Strikers

If you are using a single player in the striker position, with no support from central attacking midfield or from players moving into central areas from the wide forward positions, then he will tend to become isolated from his teammates and attacking play is likely to be less effective.

However, occasionally you may wish to use such a lone striker as part of a more defensive setup, for example when holding on to a lead against stronger opposition.

The lone striker should always be given a *number ten* role so that he will play deeper and be able to link up with his teammates to some extent. He should also ideally be given some support from the flanks by wide attackers, preferably in the wide forward positions with at least one having an attack duty, who can both supply him with passes and crosses. At the very least he should be given some support by a player in central midfield with an attack duty.

[Wide Players](#)

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[Playmaker and Target Man](#)

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